

Community, Reflexivity and Consumption

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Assumptions

- 60-80% GHG reductions needed by 2050
- implies ~ 5%/year redⁿ in GHG/GDP
- Technical progress could deliver < 3%/year
- Technological change entails consumption change anyway

Implies a substantial shift in consumption

...but consumption is complex

- Shaped by technological, economic, legal and physical context
- Meeting physiological needs
- Habits, norms and routines
- Division into sacred and profane, clean and unclean, known and unknown
- Power, status and competition
- Social participation, belongingness and role definition
- Expression and reinforcement of identity and values
- Dreaming, desire and the pursuit of happiness – symbols of the Good Life
- Consumption as discourse – expression of values

Varieties of community in Cultural Theory

Asymmetric relations

Fatalist:

Isolated/asocial
Virtues: make do,
get by
Nature to be feared

Hierarchist:

Traditional
Virtues: being true
to role, duty,
loyalty, self-
sacrifice
Nature to be kept in
order

Hermit:

Unobligated
conviviality
Virtues: self-reliance,
simplicity,
authenticity
Unity with nature

Strong group

Weak group

Individualist:

Cosmopolitan
Virtues: liberty,
competition,
progress, efficiency,
innovation
Nature as resource
base

Egalitarian:

Casual
Virtues: empathy,
sharing, non-
violence,
sufficiency
Nature vulnerable –
avoid harm

Symmetric relations

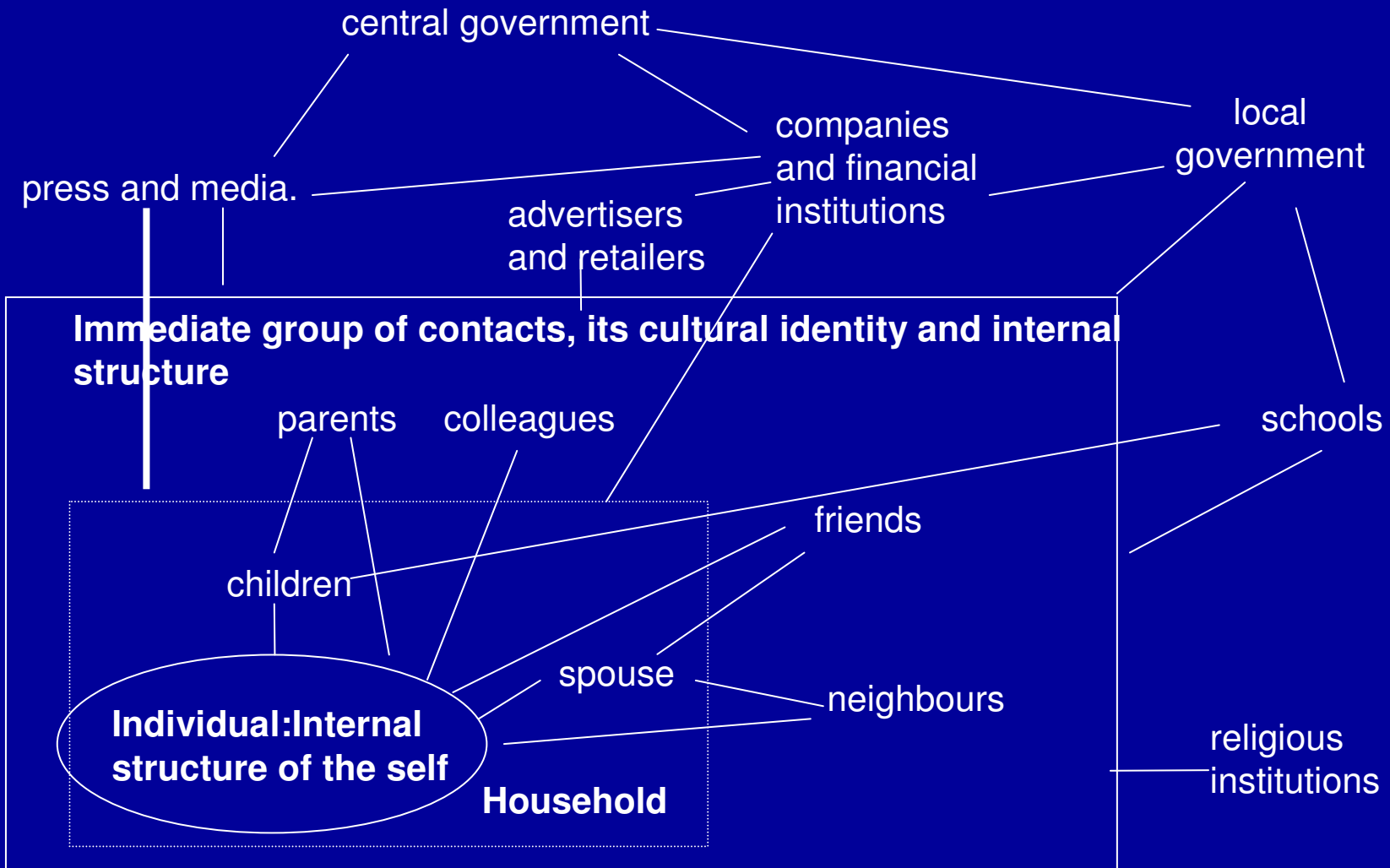
Adapted from Dake & Thompson, 1999

Designing Interventions for cultural types

Type	Effective policies	Communication strategies
Fatalist	Planning, standards, regulation and policing	Cost savings, e.g. through energy conservation.
Hierarchist	Regulation, fiscal policies, public procurement etc.	Duty, environment as heritage, care of children
Individualist	Pricing, responsibilities backed up by law.	Info. on financial & social implications of choices.
Egalitarian	Support for new markets, behaviours and products.	Stakeholder processes, community dialogue.
Hermit	Unpredictable: (well-designed policy mix).	Env., social and economic implications of choices.

Caught in a web

Wider society: structure of interacting groups, functions and subcultures



Three stories about change

Machine Metaphor

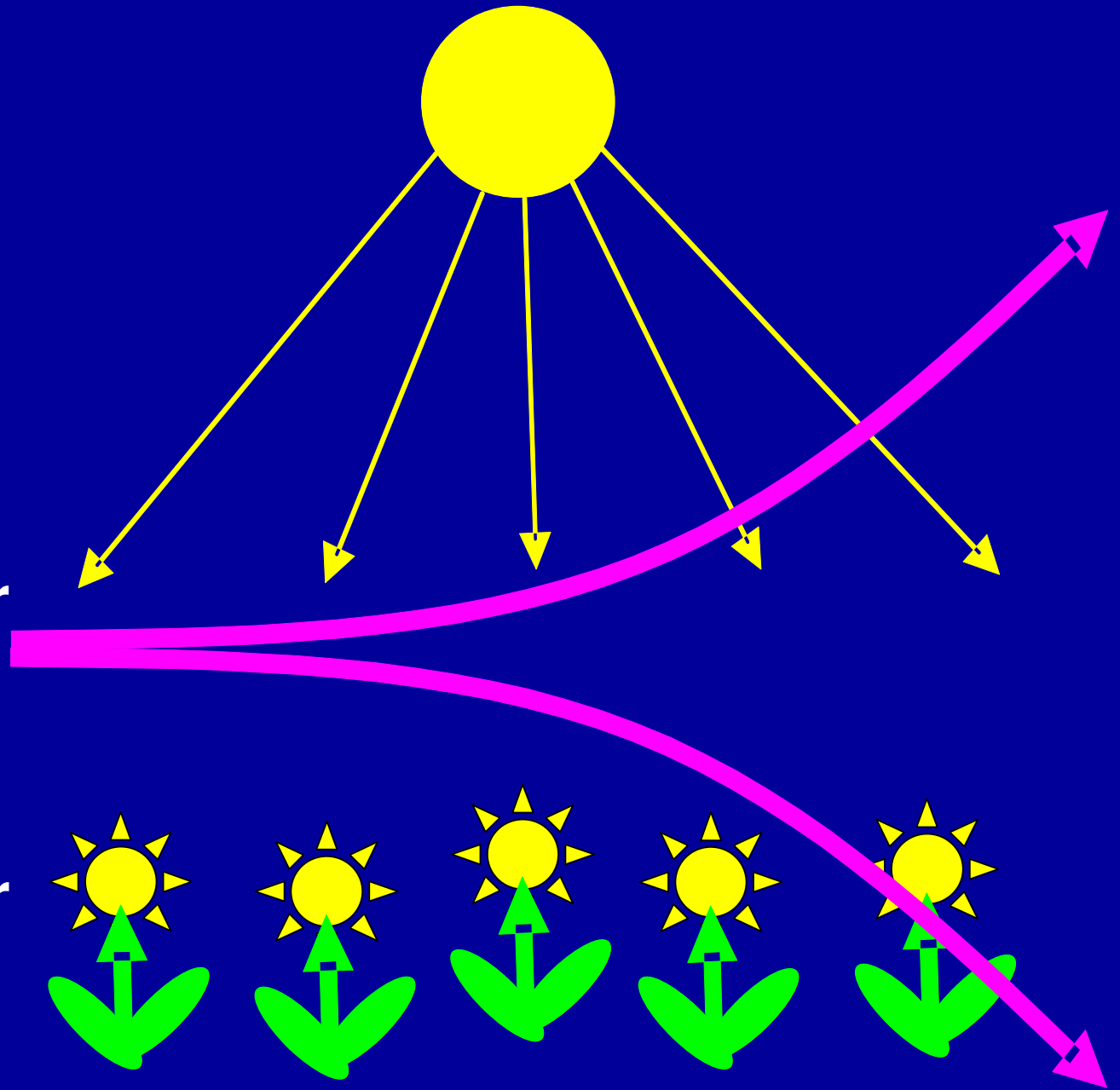
Top down control: regulation, planning, fiscal measures

Awakening Metaphor

Discourse to develop collective ethics and will

Ecosystem Metaphor

Bottom-up creativity: innovation in technology & behaviour



Back to the mythic base of culture

McIntyre/Campbell: cultural **traditions** defined by **narratives, images and rituals** that describe

1. human nature: psychology
2. how we relate to each other: sociology
3. the world around us: cosmology
4. the beyond: theology

And hence

- why we are here
- what is “good”
- ethical consumption as part of the good life

Action Learning/Inquiry

What is the Good Life? How can we flourish?

- Individual self / quality of life (“I”)
- Group / collective (“we”)
- Humanity & other life / nature (“is”)

Cycle of

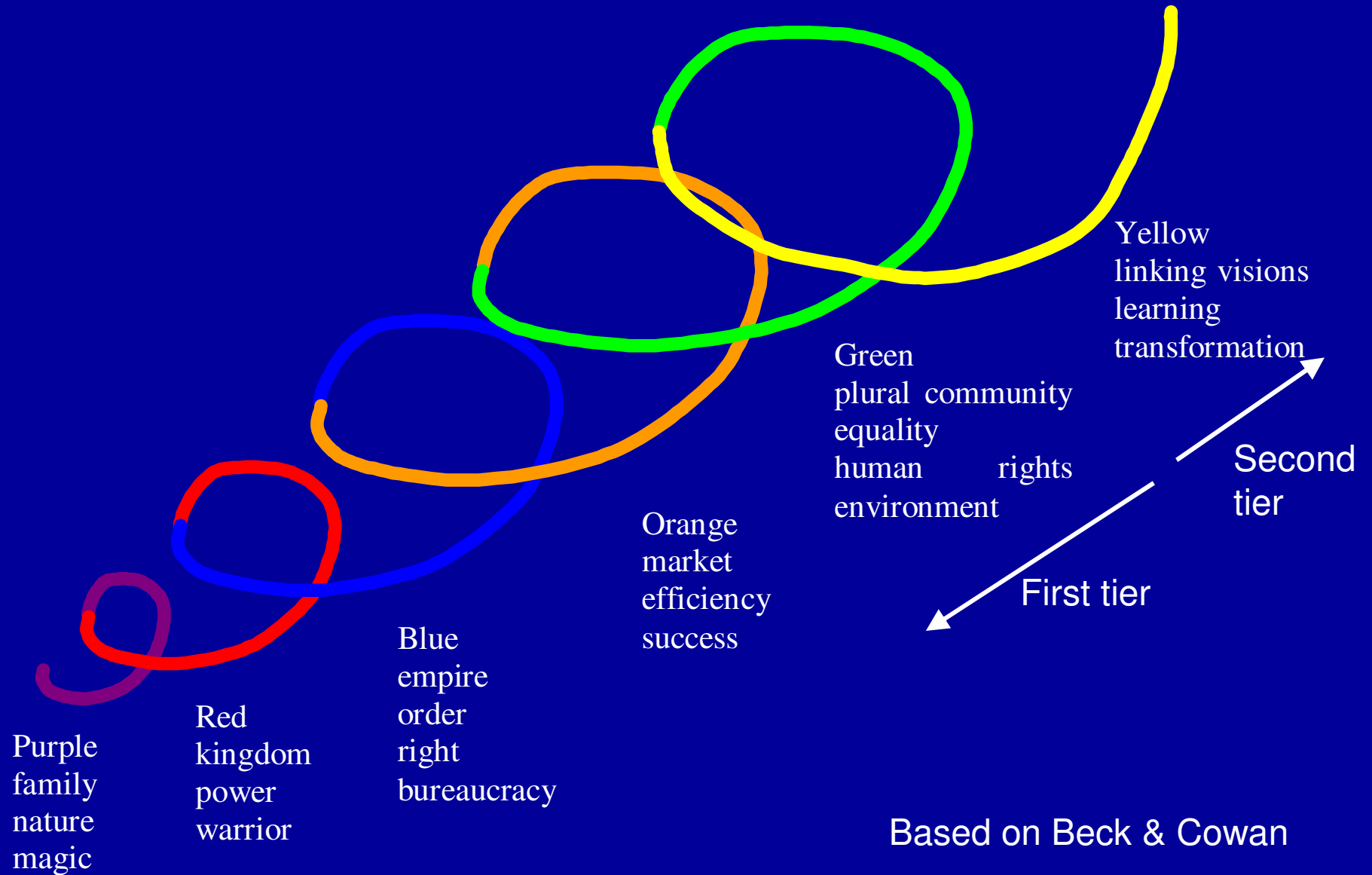
Observation – Reflection – Planning – Action

Single-, double- and open-loop learning

Communities matter

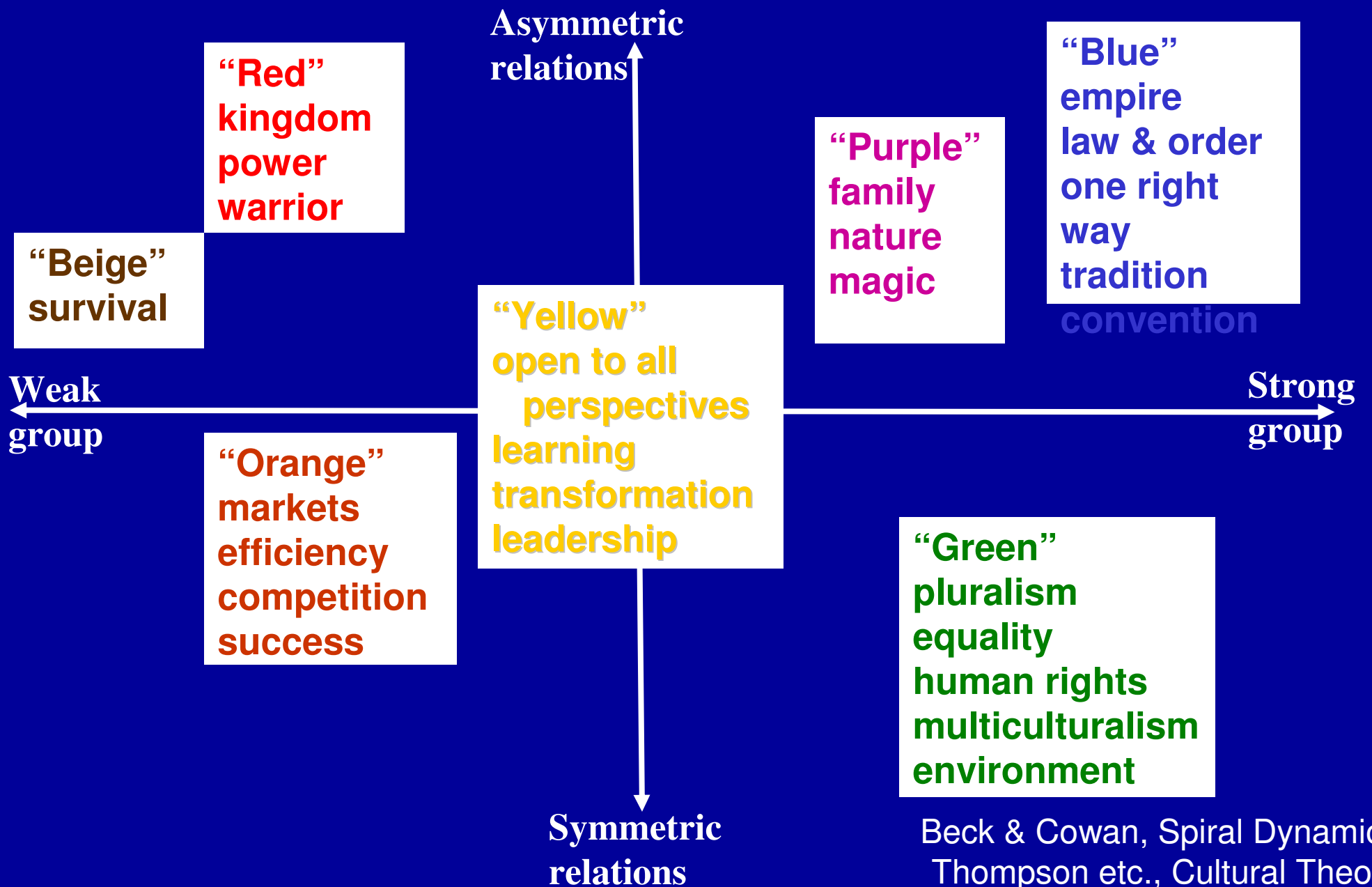
- Community is where narratives and ethics are developed, spread and consolidated
 - dynamic tension between people inhabiting different narratives/traditions
 - peer-support/affirmation for shared values, insulation from surrounding culture
- Also important for sustainability:
 - need/potential for collective action (changing social, institutional and physical infrastructure, achieving economies of scale, addressing lock-in)
 - Provide a sense of self-in-relation

Modes of culture and consciousness 1



Based on Beck & Cowan

Modes of culture and consciousness 2



Introducing Quakers

Individualist-egalitarian culture

- “worship” based on silent listening; anyone may speak “when moved by the Spirit”
- “that of God” in everyone; truth known “experimentally”; priesthood of all; scripture as resource rather than authority
- liberal theology attracts refugees from mainstream religions

Hierarchy and tradition

- hierarchical structure of meetings & committees establishes corporate narrative, including “advices and queries”, and action
- “testimonies” to truth, equality, peace, simplicity

At best, open to all perspectives yet able to find way forward

Living Witness Project

35+ Quaker meetings from Exeter to
Newcastle

Regular Link Group gatherings

Shared resources – guides to
evaluation, study and action

Engaging Quakers nationally

LWP Meetings

Ackworth, Bedford, Bournemouth & Swanage, Bristol & Frenchay, Chepstow, Chesterfield, Colchester, Cotteridge, Dorking, Exeter, Gloucester & Nailsworth, Hartington Grove (Cambridge), Huddersfield, Ikley, Lancaster, Leicester, Llanidloes, Ludlow, Machynlleth, Manchester Mount Street, Marlborough, Muswell Hill, Newcastle, Northampton, Norwich & Lynn, Oxford, Reading, Scarborough, Settle, Southampton, South Wales, Stafford, Taunton, Warwick, Watford, Wellington, Wolverhampton, Young Friends General Meeting

Building reflexive communities

1. Pseudocommunity: no dialogue about our responsibilities, guilt, concerns
2. Chaos: competing perspectives, solutions
3. Emptiness: silent listening
4. True Community: shared vision and strategy based on shared “myth”

The chaos stage

“The **real** problem is... (technology...big business...political financing...The System...)”

“We should be pressuring the government to...”

“Everyone should have solar panels and electric cars”

“I can't change the way I live because...”

“It won't make any difference anyway”

“I became a Quaker to get away from shoulds and oughts”

Emptiness: Quaker practice in theory

- Based in silent listening
 - To “promptings of love and truth in your heart – trust them as the leadings of God whose light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life”
 - To others’ experience, seeking to “respect that of God in everyone though it may be expressed in unfamiliar ways or difficult to discern”
- Unattached:
 - Speak the Truth, from own experience
 - let go of own position for “sense of the meeting”; “think it possible that you might be mistaken”

Variety of action

- learning & reflection – shared meals, eco-footprints, environmental audits – recently 11 EcoTeams
- changed lives – travel, food, housing & home energy
- engaging others – public events, high street leafletting, working with churches, schools, local communities
- practical action – greening meetings, tree planting, organic growing, community shop

Outcomes

Low-impact lifestyles:

- waste generation one fifth of UK average in Quaker EcoTeams
- 60-80% reductions in GHG by a few

Stronger communities:

- empowerment of individuals and groups
- mutual respect and understanding

Personal enjoyment:

- fun activities
- sense of purpose and achievement

Lessons learned

Most successful groups have:

- shared leadership
- inclusive, listening culture, valuing diversity, responsive to group's interests rather than pushing a particular approach.
- mixture of activities – discussion, learning, action etc.
- action at many levels – own lives, the meeting, community etc.
- regular meetings
- shared food, often on LOAF principles

Best outcomes have come from regular social events setting up and hearing reports from smaller, short-term action groups.

It takes a lot of time and consistent support

Research Questions

- What effects has the LWP approach had
 - GHG/ecological footprints of participants?
 - Collective action?
 - Community building and quality of life?
- How transferable is the approach
 - Are Quakers different from others?
 - How do LWP approaches work with other groups?

Some references

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